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# S. Mtn. Freeway route would require prehistoric digs

**Kerry Fehr-Snyder**

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In 1973, crews building the Superstition Freeway (now U.S. 60) unearthed Hohokam pottery shards, remnants of an extensive irrigation system and other relics east of Rural Road along the highway's path. The discovery prompted the federal government to halt construction of a two-mile segment from Rural to Price Road to allow archeologists time to excavate and document the discovery.

Ultimately, the federal government allowed the freeway to be built - but at ground level along that portion rather than below, as originally planned. Freeway planners at the time argued it was better to pave over the Hohokam village rather than find a new alignment for the freeway or stop its construction.

Todd Bostwick, who has studied the ancient Hohokam people for more than 25 years, said that thinking is outdated and that a Phoenix historic preservation ordinance would prevent the same thing from happening today.

"That wouldn't pass for the South Mountain Freeway," he said. "Nowadays, you have a couple of issues: The state is very strict about doing archeology, and the city of Phoenix (ordinance)."

Tempe didn't have the same protections for archeological sites decades ago when now-U.S. 60 was built.

"Times have gotten much better for archeologists," he said. "They're going to have to do archeology if they build that freeway - both in the mountain and in the flats there."

The Arizona Department of Transportation already has an idea of what lies in the freeway's path.

A draft portion of its federally mandated environmental impact statement indicates that all seven of the alternative alignments for the South Mountain Freeway "would impact prehistoric and historic cultural resources."

The Pecos Road alignment has the most prehistoric sites at seven, according to the report. The second-largest number of prehistoric sites has been identified along 55th Avenue, which ADOT chose last year as the preferred west-side alignment for the freeway.

"Archeological sites and places considered culturally important by Native American groups would be affected . . . continued operation of the freeway could interfere with ceremonial practices and religious activities of some Native American groups," according to the report.

ADOT spokesman Doug Nintzel declined to elaborate on the report or the freeway's impact on Native American sites.

"That's a sensitive subject that will be addressed in the draft final report," he said.

That sensitivity includes the need to protect artifacts from people who might try to steal them, he said.

A final decision over whether to build the 10-lane South Mountain Freeway hasn't been made. ADOT and the Federal Highway Administration are working on a draft environmental impact statement that will include air, noise, wildlife and cultural resource impacts, among others. It is expected to be released next year.

A final construction decision is expected late next year.

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